
USAID/OFDA Assistance to Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka

CURRENT SITUATION

According to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 201,800 people remain displaced in the north and east of Sri Lanka due to renewed conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Another 15,800 people have fled to Tamil Nadu state in southern India. An additional 312,000 people remain displaced due to previous conflict between the GOSL and LTTE and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. In addition, the closure of the key highway to the Jaffna peninsula (the A9 access road) and limited maritime access have affected 600,000 people in Jaffna.

Humanitarian access and the delivery of relief supplies to displaced persons in northern and eastern Sri Lanka are hindered by insecurity and restrictions by both the GOSL and LTTE. In Jaffna, many residents have reduced access to food, fuel, and medicine due to the closure of the A-9 access road. Seventeen humanitarian workers for Action Contre la Faim were killed in Muttur, eastern Sri Lanka, and civilians continue to risk being caught in the conflict. In early October, 28 humanitarian organizations issued a joint appeal to both parties requesting better access to the victims of the conflict. All of these constraints have severely affected the coping mechanisms and livelihoods of IDPs and conflict-affected communities.

From October 28 to 29, GOSL and LTTE representatives met in Geneva for peace talks; however, according to international media reports, these talks collapsed as both parties were unable to reach agreement on the reopening of the A9 access road, closed by the GOSL in August due to fighting in Jaffna. Following the collapse of the peace talks, the conflict resumed in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

CURRENT USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE

On August 11, U.S. Chargé James R. Moore declared that humanitarian conditions resulting from the conflict warranted humanitarian assistance from USAID/OFDA. On October 6, U.S. Ambassador Robert O. Blake requested additional USAID/OFDA assistance during FY 2007. Following previous trips to Sri Lanka in May and June, a USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor (RA) returned to Sri Lanka during the week of October 16 and worked closely with USAID/Sri Lanka to assess humanitarian conditions and recommend possible additional USAID/OFDA assistance.

In addition, a USAID/OFDA Geographic Information System (GIS) officer, based in Nepal, accompanied the USAID/OFDA RA to Sri Lanka to assist in the design of a conflict and risk analysis GIS in collaboration with USAID/Sri Lanka. The GIS officer assessed GIS application and information needs, identified data sources, and worked with USAID/Sri Lanka and the USAID/OFDA RA to establish an information management system to support humanitarian assistance efforts. USAID/OFDA will fund a locally hired GIS specialist who will work at USAID/Sri Lanka and receive technical support and guidance from the Nepal-based USAID/OFDA GIS officer and the USAID/OFDA RA.

In August and September 2006, USAID/OFDA provided \$1.1 million to support water and sanitation, protection, and health activities for displaced persons in Sri Lanka through the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Mercy Corps. To date in FY 2007, USAID/OFDA has allocated an additional \$1.15 million to support protection, logistics and transportation, and coordination activities in Sri Lanka. USAID/OFDA, in collaboration with USAID/Sri Lanka, other USAID offices, and implementing partners, will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide further assistance as needed.